

TO THE EDITOR, *British Journal of Venereal Diseases*

### Isolation of *Haemophilus ducreyi* from the conjunctiva

Sir,

The report by Gregory *et al* of conjunctivitis due to *Haemophilus ducreyi*<sup>1</sup> was most interesting. However, the authors have not provided sufficient information to confirm that the isolate was in fact *H ducreyi*. In our experience<sup>2</sup> the appearance of macroscopic colonial growth after only 24 hours is unusual for *H ducreyi*, and the fact that the organism required X factor but not V factor for growth does not distinguish *H ducreyi* from *H aphrophilus* or *H haemoglobinophilus*.<sup>3,4</sup> All three of these organisms usually reduce nitrate to nitrite, although exceptions occur; failure of the isolated organism to do so is not definitive.<sup>3</sup>

A porphyrin test (incubation of the organism with delta-aminolevulinic acid) and a catalase test would have been helpful; *H ducreyi* gives negative results with both tests, *H aphrophilus* is porphyrin-positive and catalase-negative, and *H haemoglobinophilus* is catalase-positive and porphyrin-negative.<sup>3,4</sup>

Hopefully, the authors will have saved their organism in order to perform these tests or to send it to a reference laboratory for definitive identification.

Yours faithfully,

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### References

1. Gregory JE, Henderson RW, Smith R. Conjunctivitis due to *Haemophilus ducreyi* infection. *Br J Vener Dis* 1980; **56**:414.
2. Handsfield HH, Totten PA, Fennell CL, Falkow S, Holmes KK. Molecular epidemiology of *Haemophilus ducreyi* infections. *Ann Intern Med* 1981; **95**:315-8.
3. Kilian M. A taxonomic study of the genus *Haemophilus*, with the proposal of a new species. *J Gen Microbiol* 1976; **93**:9-62.
4. Sottnek FO, Biddle JW, Kraus SJ, Weaver RF, Stewart JA. Isolation and identification of *Haemophilus ducreyi* in a clinical study. *J Clin Microbiol* 1980; **12**:170-4.

## Book review

**Actualités Physio-biologiques sur la Syphilis: Monographie, Semaine des Hôpitaux.** By P Collart and M Poitevin, 1981. Société d'Édition de l'Association d'Enseignement Médicale des Hôpitaux de Paris, Paris, France. (Obtainable from Institut Alfred Fournier, Paris). Pp 52. Price: frs 45·00.

This monograph is a collection of four reviews of selected aspects of research on syphilis which have appeared in *Semaine des Hôpitaux*. The aim of the authors is to relate the results of basic research to clinical and serological findings.

The first part deals with the basic bacteriology of *Treponema pallidum*, its

morphology, method of reproduction, and antigenic structure. The second describes the evolution of the disease in experimental animals and contrasts this with the course of infection in man. The behaviour of *T pallidum* in cell-culture systems is not described, although this is perhaps the most rapidly advancing field of research at present. Problems of immunity are considered in the third section and the humoral and cellular aspects described.

In the discussion of serological tests as a reflection of the immune response, a more detailed appraisal of the possible importance of the various immunoglobulin classes of antitreponemal antibody would have been of interest. The final section is devoted to

treatment with penicillin in the light of present knowledge of the pathology of syphilis. A single uniform treatment is not thought to be applicable, and in selecting the form to be used factors such as the stage of disease, type of preparation, and the age and weight of the patient must be considered.

The French school, led by Professor Collart, has made many notable contributions to our knowledge of syphilis. This monograph can be recommended to all those seeking a succinct account of its views. The wealth of references (483) also makes it a very useful guide to the literature on the topics reviewed.

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